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# A Wandering Will

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## A Wandering Will

There was nothing unusual about the simple Will of Charles D. Hall. Unmarried, he gave his modest estate to his mother, if she were living, and if not, then to his two sisters. The real interest arises from incidents following its execution and preceding the time the Will was filed for probate in the District Court of Iowa in and for Benton County—a series of extraordinary events which might well be entitled “The Case of the Captive Chaplains.”

Charles D. Hall served in the United States Army at Ft. Mills, Philippine Islands, until his period of enlistment expired and then made application for re-enlistment. Considering that he had certain talents for handling men, his commanding officer induced him to accept an honorable discharge from the Army but remain attached to the Corps of Engineers as a civilian employee. He was serving in that capacity, but under the same discipline as before, on that “day of ignominy,” December 7, 1941. The attack on Pearl Harbor left the armed forces on the Philippines in chaotic confusion. Reorganizing, courageously they maintained a determined resistance against the Japanese invaders, only to be overwhelmed. In May,



1942, Hall, along with many thousand others, became prisoners of war and were subjected to a terrible ordeal of cruelty and near starvation at the Bilibid Military Prison, Manila, Philippine Islands.

In the fall of 1944 the Japanese began removing many prisoners of war from the conquered Philippines. Anticipating that he would be transferred, on October 15, 1944 Hall requested his friend, Chaplain Perry O. Wilcox to prepare a Will, the signing of which was then attested by Wilcox and two other war prisoners, Chaplains John F. Duffy and F. J. McManus, as witnesses.

Not quite a year after the Will was executed it was filed for probate in the District Court of Benton County, Iowa, and letters were mailed to the three subscribing witnesses preliminary to the issuance of depositions for the taking of their testimony. Then there unfolded the story of a succession of such strange circumstances as to be almost beyond belief.

Chaplain Wilcox promptly replied to the letter sent to him, giving some facts. Others later came to light. When Hall was about to be transferred from Bilibid prison camp, he delivered his Will to Wilcox and asked him to try to get it back to Hall's mother if the opportunity should arise. On December 13, 1944, Charles Hall was placed aboard an unmarked Japanese prison ship, bound for Japan. On December 15th the ship was tor-



pedoed and sunk by an American submarine, under the belief it was a Japanese troop ship. All aboard were killed or drowned, except a very few Americans in the forward hold, who survived.

A few days later Chaplain Wilcox was shipped on an unmarked Japanese prison ship. It, too, was torpedoed and sunk. Wilcox was one of the few who were picked up by an American ship. Though badly injured he survived and was returned to the United States bringing with him the Will which his friend had left in his safekeeping. From his bed in Fitzsimmons General Hospital, Denver, Colorado, Colonel Wilcox gave his deposition concerning the execution of the Will of Charles Hall.

He also provided some facts concerning the other witnesses. Chaplains Duffy and McManus were being transferred to Japan on the same prison ship as Hall when it was torpedoed. However, they were in the forward hold and were uninjured. Another Japanese vessel picked them up and the other survivors and carried them to Japan. At the end of the war Chaplain Duffy was released from a prison in Japan.

Prior to that, however, a final and tragic ordeal remained to be encountered. The war had reached the stage when military installations in Japan were being subjected to terrific bombardments from the air. American bombers, believing the prison camp where Duffy and McManus were held was a sup-



# CHRISTMAS EVE IN BILIBID

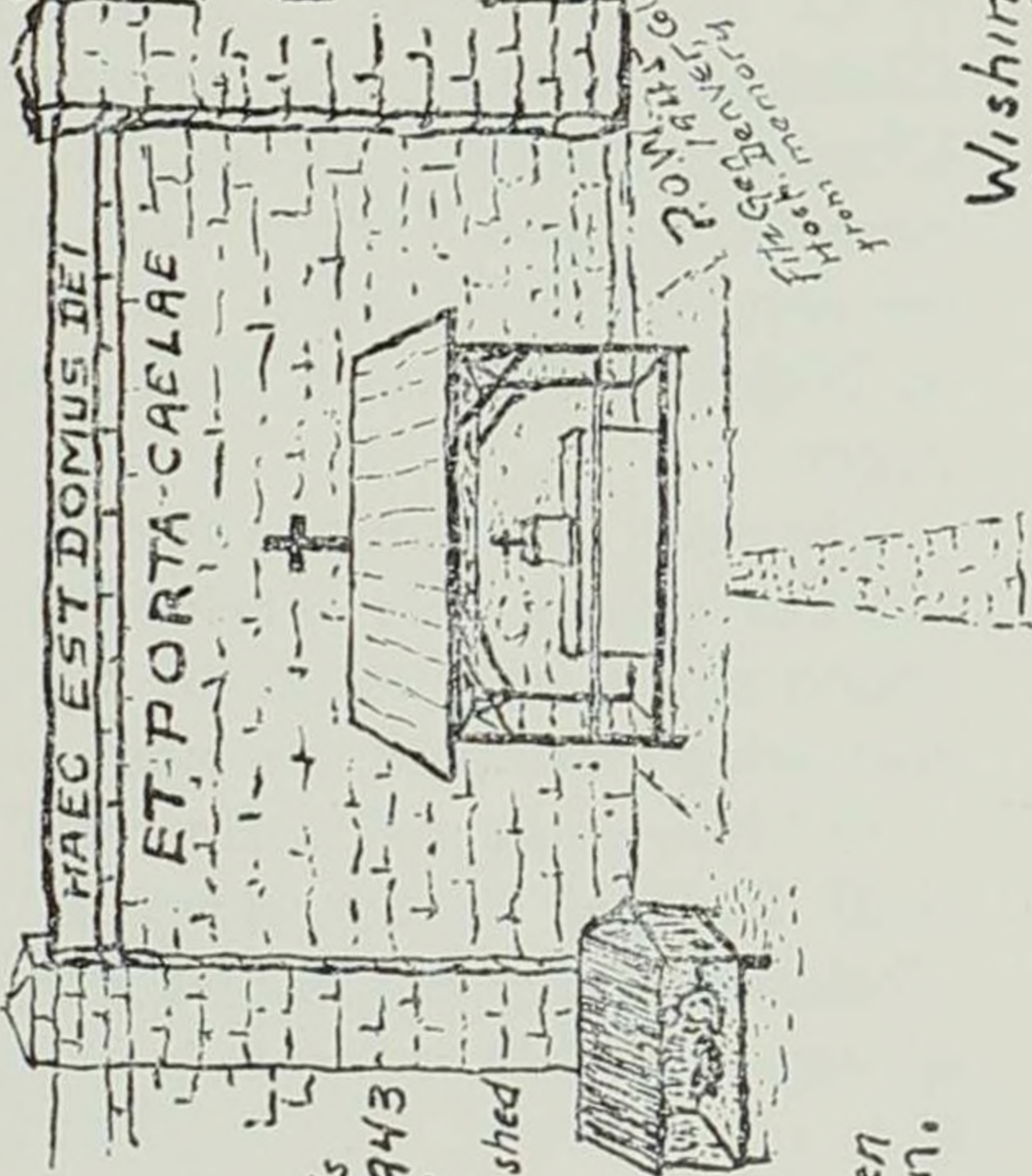
Where spreads a verdant mango T'was Christmas Eve and  
 shade  
 Beside the prison wall,  
 In Bilibid a shrine is made  
 With altar, cross and all;  
 Where bars and guards and walls  
 Of stone  
 Do keep in durance grim  
 The men who fought for right alone  
 Whose faith has not grown dim.

Dedicated to Father  
 William T. Cummings  
 Roman Catholic Chaplain  
 Bilibid Military Prison  
 Manila, Philippine Islands  
 June 1942 to October 1943  
 He is the "father" in the third  
 stanza above. He accomplished  
 the building of the altar  
 and shelter. After  
 surviving the sinking of  
 two Japanese prison  
 ships, he died of starvation  
 on a third somewhere between  
 Formosa and Moji, Japan.

This represents typical  
 Prisoner of War stationery

And gathered all around  
 They stand like shepherds in the  
 night  
 To listen to the sound  
 Of angels as they sing the song  
 Announcing Jesus' birth  
 For through the years it rolls along  
 Proposing peace on earth.

Yes, Christmas Eve in Bilibid  
 A rustic shrine is there  
 On gospel side by nipa hid  
 The Child and mother fair.  
 The "father" stands in vestments  
 white  
 To celebrate the Mass  
 While Christmas music fills the  
 Night,  
 Good will and peace at last.



"Est Domus Dei et Porta Caeli"  
 Incribed in Latin tongue,  
 The House of God and Heaven's Gate  
 On prison wall is hung  
 This barrier strong, a prison wall,  
 Proclaims the soul's release  
 With joy and liberty for all  
 Thru God's good will and peace  
 So gathered all around they stood  
 These prisoners of war  
 To dedicate the Shrine to God  
 And worship as of yore.  
 Thus consecrating wood to God  
 The work of human hands  
 The way to heaven they have trod  
 These prisoners in bands.

Perry O. Wilcox 1942

Wishing you every Christmas and  
 New Year blessing  
 Chaplain and Mrs. Perry O. Wilcox  
 Three green  
 leaves of tillium →



ply depot, battered it with a severe attack. Father McManus died in the arms of Reverend Duffy. Thus the letter which had been mailed to Chaplain F. J. McManus, U. S. Navy, was undelivered. It was returned, bearing the fateful notation, "Killed in Action."

\* \* \* \*

At Christmas time, 1942, Charles Hall and Perry O. Wilcox were in Bilibid prison camp. A Christmas Mass was conducted by Catholic Chaplain, Father William T. Cummings. Protestant Chaplain Wilcox was so impressed with the service that he wrote a poem "Christmas Eve in Bilibid, 1942" on a rough piece of wrapping paper.

Chaplain Cummings was duly transferred from the Philippines. He survived the sinking of two prison ships, only to die of starvation on a third somewhere between Formosa and Moji, Japan.

In 1945, while still bedfast in Fitzsimmons Hospital, Colonel Wilcox rewrote from memory the Christmas eve poem he had written, as a prisoner of war, in Bilibid, in 1942.

JOHN W. TOBIN